

# THE GREAT SOUTH ASIAN WAR

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## U.S. IMPERIAL STRATEGY IN ASIA

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# ASIAN DEFENSE PERIMETER, 1945-71



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*"As we look to the future of the Pacific we recognize that if peace survives in the last one-third of the century it will depend more on what happens in the Pacific than anywhere else in the globe."*

President Richard M. Nixon  
19 November 1969

# THE GREAT SOUTH ASIAN WAR

## MICHAEL KLARE

*Mr. Klare, a staff member of the North American Congress on Latin America, is completing a book on counterinsurgency planning in the United States.*

To gain a world-historical perspective on the war in Vietnam, one must see it as but one episode in a Great South Asian War that began almost immediately after World War II, and can be expected to continue into the 1970s, if not well beyond them. The Great War has already encompassed the Indo-Chinese War of Independence (1946-54), the guerrilla war in Malaya (1948-60), intermittent warfare in Laos (continuing), guerrilla skirmishes in Thailand (continuing), and other armed struggles in Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia. Combatants in these conflicts have included, in addition to troops of the countries named, the armies of Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Nationalist China and, of course, the United States.

These episodes constitute a common war not only because they occupy overlapping zones in a single theatre of war but also because they spring from a common cause: the determination of the advanced industrial nations of the West (led by the United States) to intensify their control over the destinies of the underdeveloped lands of Asia. The Western presence in South Asia is naturally a military and economic challenge to Communist China, whose real or imagined influence has been a factor in each of these struggles. But it is not the threat of Chinese bellicosity that lends unity to all these episodes; it is rather the determination of the region's indigenous peoples to secure a future that will be free of foreign control. Because the nations of South Asia are frozen in a state of underdevelopment, and because national boundaries (which, more often than not, were established by European powers) do not always conform to ethnic distribution, these conflicts often take the form of "insurgencies"—i.e., local struggles against centralized authority—and the response to them has been a succession of "counterinsurgencies." Although the doctrine of counterinsurgency was originally formulated to substitute a strategy of "limited warfare" for the obsolete strategies of "all-out" (i.e., nuclear) warfare, in South Asia counterinsurgency threatens to become *unlimited* in its duration.

At the end of World War II, the United States and its allies in Western Europe agreed to sanction the re-establishment of one another's spheres of influence in Asia. The United States, having conquered Japan, was to be dominant in the western Pacific (China, Japan, the Philippines, etc.); France would remain in Indo-China, and Britain in the Indian Ocean area (India, Burma, Malaya, Singapore, etc.). The Allies also apportioned responsibility for the maintenance of a defense perimeter, corresponding to their colonial holdings, which encircled the eastern half of Asia from Korea to Kashmir, and pledged to assist one another if any point on the perimeter came under heavy attack. This "gentleman's agreement" was soon put to the test, for the restoration of colonial regimes in South Asia (revoking wartime promises of independence) produced guerrilla warfare throughout the region. Several countries won their independence this way, where continued occupation would have been unprofitable (Burma) or beyond the capacity of the home economy (Indonesia). But in Southeast Asia proper, the colonialists were prepared to engage in protracted counter guerrilla struggles to maintain their control of the area's resources. In Malaya it took Britain (with the aid of Australia and Gurkha tribesmen) twelve years to force the last remnants of the Malayan Races Liberation Army across the border into Thailand. In Indo-China, France faced an even more formidable foe. In 1950, confronted with a deteriorating military situation in Vietnam and growing discontent at home, France appealed to the United States to honor its commitment and help prevent a breach of the Asian defense perimeter. Although the United States had already deployed its troops in South Korea to protect the northern flank of the perimeter, it nevertheless agreed to supply France with arms and badly needed funds (the total U.S. contributions to the French military struggle in Indo-China amounted to \$2.6 billion, or 80 per cent of the cost of the war).

Despite this help, the Viet Minh won at Dienbienphu, and the French army withdrew from Southeast Asia, leaving a substantial military vacuum at the mid-point of the Asian defense perimeter. The United States—which until this time had considered Southeast Asia to be of secondary importance to its Pacific territories—quickly moved in. The French colonial



apparatus had not completed its removal from Saigon when America's first paramilitary legions began arriving. To circumvent the Geneva Accords, which prohibited the introduction of new weapons or foreign military personnel into Vietnam, the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) was established to provide a "cover" for the CIA team which armed and trained Ngo Dinh Diem's secret police and palace guard. The gradual intensification of U.S. military activity in Vietnam—from the arrival of the first Special Forces "advisers" to the deployment of a half-million-man army—is too familiar to need repeating. Less familiar, perhaps, is the history of U.S. involvement in Laos and Thailand; it is only in the past few months, in fact, that the public has learned that the United States maintains a substantial—and active—military establishment in Laos, and that we are bound to the Bangkok government by secret military protocols. Despite the well-publicized U.S. troop withdrawals from South Vietnam, U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia has actually *increased* in the past few months, with most of this increase taking place in Laos.

During his recent eleven-nation tour of Asia, Vice

President Spiro Agnew stated in Australia that "despite a great deal of speculation and rumor, the United States is not withdrawing from Asia and the Pacific." Thanks to the assiduous journalism of a few "Establishment" newspapers—particularly those which have come under attack from Mr. Agnew—there can no longer be any denying that the U.S. war effort in Vietnam has "spilled over" into the rest of Southeast Asia. What is *not* known by most Americans is that the Pentagon is now preparing for combat operations in the neighboring regions of South Asia.

On January 16, 1968, Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that Great Britain would withdraw all its troops stationed east of the Suez Canal by the end of 1971. British bases in Asia—located in Singapore, Malaysia and several Persian Gulf sites—formed the backbone of a defense line extending across the entire Indian Ocean area. Britain's impending withdrawal from this region produced consternation in Washington, where it had always been assumed that the English could be counted upon to protect America's western flank in Asia. One U.S. strategist, James D. Atkinson, wrote: "For almost a century

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the vast Red Sea-Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean complex was an area of relative stability. This was so because . . . British forces were on hand throughout these sea spaces and able to respond quickly for any needed police actions." With Britain no longer willing to perform this police function, the Pentagon began making plans to assume responsibility for defense of the Indian Ocean area. These preparations—including the acquisition of new bases and the development of new combat capabilities—have been artfully camouflaged in Defense Department statements, with the result that very few Americans know that such plans exist. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the United States is developing the ability to fight a naval war in the Indian Ocean or a land war on the peaks of the Himalayas.

The military does not plan in a milieu devoid of political and economic considerations; before proceeding with a discussion of U.S. military strategy in South Asia it is necessary, therefore, to investigate the principal nonmilitary factors which have determined the limits of that strategy.

The Pacific-Indian Ocean area has achieved parity with Latin America and Europe as an outlet for U.S. trade and investment. According to the Commerce Department, U.S. trade with Asia and Oceania amounted to \$12.9 billion in 1967, compared with \$9.4 billion in Latin America and \$18.5 billion in Europe. Direct U.S. investment in this area is only \$6.8 billion, the comparable figures for Latin America and Europe being \$10.3 billion and \$17.9 billion, but earnings are unusually high: \$1.7 billion in 1968, compared with \$1.4 billion for Latin America and only \$1.3 billion for Europe. While trade with Japan (America's leading trading partner after Canada) accounts for a large bulk of U.S. commerce in the Pacific, our economic relations with other Asian countries are growing steadily. To be sure, the current boom in favored Pacific countries is largely the result of Vietnamese War spending—Japan, Okinawa, South Korea and the Philippines all provide essential goods and services for the U.S. forces, and profit handsomely from our installations on their territory. But long-term investments—particularly in mining and oil refining—indicate that U.S. economic interest in the area will grow.

Closer examination of trade and investment data suggests that the center of gravity of U.S. economic activity in Asia is shifting southwestward, from the North Pacific to Southeast Asia, Australia and Indonesia (thus following the line of military advance sketched above). Although direct American trade and investment in the Indian Ocean has not increased as rapidly as in the Pacific, the region is a principal market for countries like Australia and Japan whose economies, through the agency of "multinational corporations," are becoming increasingly linked to that of the United States. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean itself has acquired considerable strate-

gic importance (particularly since the closing of the Suez Canal) as a major sea route for oil. The Middle East's abundant fields now supply 50 per cent of the oil imports of Western Europe, 90 per cent of Japan's, 65 per cent of Australia's, and 83 per cent of Africa's (as well as most of the oil used by the United States in Vietnam). Some of it is carried by pipe line to the Mediterranean, but the bulk of it goes by tanker across or around the Indian Ocean. Finally, one must never forget that the Indian Ocean borders on the second, fifth and sixth most populous countries in the world (India, Indonesia and Pakistan), whose allegiance to the West is considered a major objective of U.S. policy. If any of these countries were to undergo a Communist revolution, Western domination of the entire area would be threatened as other Asian countries readjusted their trade and political relations to accommodate the changed strategic balance.

Long-term U.S. strategy in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas can perhaps best be described as the "Latin Americanization" of South Asia—i.e., the stabilization of Asia's dependent status vis-à-vis the United States, as a supplier of raw materials and market for manufactured goods. As in other parts of the Third World, the United States has cultivated partnership arrangements with the more advanced nations in the region (in this case, Australia and Japan), in order to exploit more efficiently the resources of the whole area. Because this strategy will doom South Asia to a condition of permanent underdevelopment, and most of its inhabitants (especially those in rural areas) to a condition of permanent impoverishment, conflict is inevitable. The revolutionary tide which swept through the colonial nations after World War II has not diminished with the attainment of nominal self-rule: everywhere in the Third World rebellious peasants are demanding that their economic emancipation be postponed no longer. In Vietnam, the United States has learned at tremendous cost the hard lesson that even poor farmers—once inspired by the promise of a better life for their children—can stop the most powerful armies in the world. It has become abundantly clear that American plans for the creation of a mercantile empire in South Asia will require the continued presence and intervention of U.S. troops (or native troops under American command) for as long as one can see into the future.

This analysis is evidently shared by military planners in the Pentagon, for despite Presidential promises of a U.S. troop withdrawal from Asia following the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam, the Pentagon has shown that it expects to maintain a military establishment in the area for the indefinite future. In its fiscal 1970 budget report to the Congress, the Defense Department stated that it will "be necessary for the United States to continue some form of military presence in the region for some time and this





must include appropriate basing arrangements." But popular disaffection with the Vietnamese War in particular, and with defense spending in general, has created a problem for Pentagon strategists. To solve it, they have evolved a three-pronged strategy that is designed to minimize direct U.S. involvement in Asia, while assuring our mastery of future guerrilla battlefields. This scheme, constituting the U.S. defense plan for the Great South Asian War, can be summarized as follows:

¶The creation of client regimes in each Asian nation, backed by the native military establishment and dependent on U.S. economic assistance for survival, which are obliged to provide indigenous troops for counterinsurgency operations planned and directed by U.S. "advisers."

¶The establishment of an "Anglo-Saxon Alliance"—the United States, New Zealand, Australia and ultimately the Union of South Africa—to protect the Asian interests of the (white) people inhabiting these former British colonies.

¶The formation of an elite counterinsurgency "fire brigade," composed of U.S. servicemen trained and equipped for combat in irregular jungle and mountain terrain, which can be flown to trouble spots in Asia from rear-area bases in the United States when serious emergencies occur.

Each of these goals will now be discussed in detail.

**CLIENT REGIMES.** Throughout the Third World, the United States has so manipulated the social and economic relationships of native populations as to create subgroups which place loyalty to Washington over that to their fellow countrymen. U.S. foreign aid programs, import subsidies and military grants are all designed to create in each country a privileged stratum dependent upon continued Ameri-

can beneficence for its prosperity. When such a group acquires control of the national government, the United States ultimately exercises the power. Since the ruling group remains dependent on U.S. aid even when in control of the governmental apparatus (in order to finance development projects and meet military payrolls), Washington can compel a client regime to provide troops for U.S.-led counterinsurgency campaigns. This process of cultural subversion is easily discerned in South Vietnam, but the same mechanisms prevail elsewhere in Asia, particularly in Thailand, South Korea and Laos. This arrangement affords two advantages to the United States: it reduces the need to maintain large overseas garrisons, and avoids local antagonism to the overt American presence.

In every country where U.S. funds provide a significant percentage of the military budget, native troops are being armed and trained for counter guerrilla operations. In Thailand, for instance, the U.S. military assistance program (estimated at \$100 million per year) is being used to provide the entire army of more than 100,000 men with M16 rifles, machine guns, radios and other standard light equipment designed for jungle conditions. Thai recruits are trained in their homeland by U.S. Special Forces instructors, and then sent for further "on-the-job" experience in Vietnam and Laos, where they participate in combat operations under U.S. command. Thai troops in Vietnam (now numbering 11,000) are rotated frequently, so that as many soldiers as possible acquire some familiarity with anti-guerrilla warfare. Whereas most Americans assume that these troops were brought in as a publicity gesture to "internationalize" the U.S. intervention, it is now clear that an equally important objective is to provide advanced counter guerrilla training to troops that



may some day be called upon to employ their skills in other countries (or perhaps in their own).

The Pentagon apparently prefers to concentrate its efforts on the formation of small, well-equipped and highly motivated units, rather than on large, general purpose armies made up of undisciplined recruits of questionable loyalty. Thus each country receiving substantial military aid has been obliged to create special counter guerrilla units, variously called "Rangers" or "Special Forces" after their American counterparts. They usually receive their training from Special Forces instructors, and attend special indoctrination courses developed by American social scientists. Again taking Thailand as an example, the Green Berets have helped organize the Thai Special Forces Group, a 1,000-man unit regarded by some observers as the best military force in Thailand. Crack units of this sort often develop a closer relationship to their American advisers (who, moreover, pay their salaries), than to native officers. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Vietnam, such units often outperform regular South Vietnamese troops.

Though most U.S. military assistance programs in Asia are designed to strengthen the internal security capabilities of the regular armed forces, in some instances the Pentagon and CIA have by-passed the native military establishment to create irregular military forces which operate independently of the regular army, and usually under direct U.S. command. The mercenaries who serve in these independent armies are frequently recruited from the minority groups which can be found in most South Asian countries. Many of them have suffered at the hands of the dominant ethnic group, and are thus susceptible to psychological pressure designed to turn them against guerrilla units drawn from the majority group. Thus in Vietnam the Americans created the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, made up of Montagnard tribesmen, and stationed them in border areas where they could be used for raids into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. A similar force, known as the Armée Clandestine and composed of Meo tribesmen, has been active in Laos since the 1950s. According to *The New York Times*, this force of 15,000 mercenaries, "is armed, equipped, fed, paid, guided strategically and tactically, and often transported into and out of action by the United States." The Armée Clandestine is commanded by CIA operatives attached to the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, and functions independently of the Laotian High Command. It is credited with several recent victories against Pathet Lao troops, and is considered more reliable than regular Laotian units, which often retreat in the face of concerted enemy attacks.

Even the "nonmilitary" components of the U.S. foreign aid program are designed to foster the development of surrogate counter guerrilla armies in

Asia. It has been established that a major portion of funds channeled through AID are used to subsidize the police forces of many Asian nations. Approximately half of the AID budget in Thailand, for instance, is devoted to this purpose; U.S. funds are being used to construct 1,000 new police stations in rural areas (especially in the troubled Northeast), each of which is to be manned by at least twenty members of the Thai National Police or paramilitary Border Patrol Police. Before assuming their new posts, these officers will receive six weeks of counterinsurgency and jungle warfare training provided by AID's "Public Safety Advisers."

The long-range objectives of U.S. assistance programs in Asia were summed up by former Defense Secretary Clark M. Clifford in an unusually candid statement to Congress on January 15, 1969:

Clearly, the overriding goal of our collective defense efforts in Asia must be to assist our allies in building a capability to defend themselves. *Besides costing substantially less* (an Asian soldier costs about 1/15 as much as his American counterpart), *there are compelling political and psychological advantages on both sides of the Pacific for such a policy.* [Emphasis added.] Moreover, as our experience with the South Korean Army has so well demonstrated, there are no insuperable obstacles to the development of good local land forces capable of offering a credible deterrent to a Communist aggression.

Aside from the curious remark on the dollar value of Asian soldiers, this statement is noteworthy as a straightforward expression of the policies discussed above.

ANGLO-SAXON ALLIANCE. In the alliances which the United States has contracted during the cold-war era, there exists an unspoken but evident differentiation between contracts of convenience and contracts of conviction. While the State Department may speak glowingly of U.S.-Vietnamese friendship, U.S.-Korean friendship, or U.S.-Thai friendship, there are very few countries which Washington trusts implicitly—trusts, that is, with secret military information or access to the inner circles of defense policy making. The small group of countries which do enjoy these privileges have two striking characteristics in common: they are all former colonies of Great Britain, and are all ruled by the white descendants of European immigrants. At present, this select group includes Canada, Australia and New Zealand; if the Pentagon had its way, and diplomatic considerations were set aside, the Union of South Africa would also be admitted to this exclusive club. Military officers of these favored countries routinely receive copies of secret U.S. intelligence reports, are kept informed of Pentagon work on chemical and biological warfare and other secret projects, and participate as equals in military strategy conferences. In order to cement this working relationship still more firmly, the Pentagon has initiated Project Mallard, which will ultimately provide a "joint tactical international communication



system for the armies, navies and air forces of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia." One does not share military communications channels with any but the closest allies.

Anglo-Saxon cooperation in the Pacific is guaranteed by the ANZUS Pact (Security Treaty Between Australia, New Zealand and the United States), which commits these countries to assist one another in the event of an attack on any one of them, or upon any of their Pacific dependencies. Australia and New Zealand are further associated with the United States as members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (the only other Asian members are Thailand and the Philippines—both heavily dependent upon U.S. military assistance). The strength of the ties which bind the military establishments of Australia and New Zealand to that of the United States is perhaps best shown by the fact that both countries have supplied combat troops for Vietnam, despite widespread domestic opposition. When Vice President Agnew arrived in Canberra, he referred to Australia's contribution to the U.S. war effort in Korea and Vietnam, and stated that in its future endeavors, Australia "will always have the unfailing support and loyal friendship of the United States of America." In a subsequent press conference, Agnew spoke of the "common English ancestry" of Australia and America. The Vice President was told by Prime Minister Gorton that "you have never been more welcome than you are here in the capital of Australia."

The close relations that developed in recent years among the United States, Australia and New Zealand spring not just from a common language and cultural heritage but also from some very real policy considerations. The United States, as said above, seeks to replace its forces in Asia with foreign troops whose loyalty to U.S. objectives can be relied upon; Australia and New Zealand, for their part, must be assured of unhampered trade with, and sea routes to, the nations bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Australia, moreover, is motivated by policies of racial exclusion; like the whites of South Africa, Australians dread the traditional southward migration patterns of colored peoples, and are therefore willing to provide military assistance to their northern neighbors (Australia provides such aid to Malaysia and Singapore, just as South Africa does to Rhodesia) in order to establish a buffer zone against further migrations. These racial considerations are not incompatible with U.S. policy, which seeks to maintain Western, (i.e., white) hegemony in the Pacific-Indian Ocean area. Thus in return for its promise to come to the assistance of Australia and New Zealand in any future emergencies, the United States has been invited to establish new military installations in those countries, and can expect their help in the reconstitution of the Asian defense perimeter following the withdrawal of Great Britain in 1971.

The U.S. naval operations in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean will be greatly facilitated upon completion of communications facilities in Canterbury, New Zealand, and North West Cape, Australia. These will house very low frequency (VLF) radio transmitters (for use in communicating with submerged Polaris submarines) in addition to conventional transmitters. The Canterbury station, part of the "Omega" communications system, has provoked some local opposition, but the Australian facility is well under construction. Known as U.S. Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt (for the late Prime Minister), the North West Cape installation will house the most powerful VLF transmitter in the world.

When it is completed, the United States will have acquired the requisite communications capacity for expanded naval operations along the eastern rim of the Indian Ocean (a similar facility at Asmara, Ethiopia, performs the same role in the western part of the ocean). The operational capability of U.S. naval vessels sent to the Indian Ocean would be enhanced even further if present diplomatic sanctions against South Africa were dropped. The Navy is particularly eager to gain access to the Simons-town naval base, strategically located on the Cape of Good Hope, for refueling and repair work. The Defense Department would also like to cooperate with South Africa in the collection of intelligence data on naval and maritime activity along the coast of Africa. Although the Pentagon has heretofore spoken cautiously on this subject, a number of influential Congressman, including Sen. Strom Thurmond, are urging the White House to adopt some kind of formula for limited military cooperation (excluding internal security ventures) with South Africa.

The cooperation of Australia and New Zealand will become even more useful to the United States in December 1971 when the last British troops leave South Asia. Britain is currently pledged to provide for the defense of the Federation of Malaysia (which incorporates the former colonies of Malaya, Sarawak and North Borneo) and the island state of Singapore. These two countries, whose combined armies boast only 40,000 men and a handful of aircraft, are threatened by lingering guerrilla activity along the Thai border, by territorial disputes with the Philippines and Indonesia, and by internal racist unrest. Because of their strategic location, and the high potential for conflict, the impending British withdrawal has compelled the United States to contemplate some police role. Since, however, the stability of this area is also considered vital to the security of Australia and New Zealand, the United States will be able to leave primary defense to its Anglo-Saxon allies. Australia and New Zealand will jointly maintain a battalion each at Singapore, with one company on rotation in Malaysia. They will each station a naval vessel in the area at all times, and Australia will keep two squadrons of jet aircraft at Butterworth,



near the Thai border. Australia has also promised to supply the Malaysian Air Force with ten Sabre-jet fighters and the necessary maintenance equipment.

While neither Australia nor New Zealand—with armies of 84,000 men and 13,000 men—can be considered major military powers, their role in maintaining the Asian defense perimeter is not insignificant and renders the burden of the United States that much more manageable.

**THE FIRE BRIGADE.** It now appears that upon the conclusion of the war in Vietnam, the United States will remove most of its troops from the mainland of Asia, leaving behind only those communications, supply and intelligence officers and Special Forces personnel necessary for the reliable performance of native armies. (Defense Secretary Laird recently stated that we would maintain several thousand men for advisory and training duty in Vietnam *after* the fighting had ceased.) In previous epochs, this move would have denied a colonial power the ability to intervene quickly when native insurrections threatened the *status quo*. Thanks to the foresight of Robert McNamara, however, the Pentagon now has the capacity to intervene in any future emergency by air-lifting its counterinsurgency “fire brigade” from bases in the United States to back-country airfields in Asia. The fire brigade concept, made possible by new advances in aircraft technology, permits the United States to give up the overseas bases usually associated with a large empire, while nevertheless retaining the option of employing its troops whenever it deems intrusion necessary.

In a 1965 message to the Senate Appropriations Committee, Defense Secretary McNamara outlined America’s strategic alternatives: “Either we can station large numbers of men and quantities of equipment and supplies overseas near all potential trouble spots, or we can maintain a much smaller force in a central reserve in the United States and deploy it rapidly where needed.” Of these two approaches, McNamara argued, “a mobile ‘fire brigade’ reserve, centrally located . . . and ready for quick deployment to any threatened area in the world, is, basically, a more economical and flexible use of our military forces.” Selecting a unit to serve as such a mobile reserve was easy enough (the 82nd Airborne Division was given the job), but McNamara soon discovered that our existing air-lift capability—consisting mainly of propeller-driven C-124 Globemasters and jet-powered C-141 Starlifters—did not have the range, speed or capacity to provide a satisfactory alternative to locally based troops. His solution was to develop the CX-HLS Heavy Logistics Transport—now famous as the C-5A transport aircraft.

The C-5A was the subject of considerable Congressional debate in 1969 because of excessive cost

“overruns” (the final procurement program, involving 120 aircraft, would have cost an estimated \$6 billion, or \$2.6 billion more than originally calculated). In order to overcome mounting Congressional criticism of defense contracting procedures, the Pentagon finally decided in November to limit its purchase to the eighty-one aircraft previously authorized by Congress. Even the curtailed C-5A program will, however, provide the United States with a vastly expanded air-lift capacity. Each super-jet can carry 600 troops and their equipment, or an equivalent combination of troops, vehicles and artillery. The initial group of fifty-eight C-5As will permit the Pentagon to ship an entire combat division, plus ammunition and supplies, a distance of 5,800 nautical miles (more than enough range to fly from San Francisco to Tokyo) without stopping for fuel. Once arriving in a theatre of combat, the transport’s “high flotation” landing gear permits it to land on short, relatively primitive airfields.

Unfortunately, the budgetary aspects of the C-5A debate have had the effect of obscuring the long-



run strategic implications of the whole air-lift program. But if there were any doubts concerning the Pentagon’s intentions, they were dispelled in mid-March 1969 when the Defense Department staged its first air-lift exercise in the Far East. Some 2,500 soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division were flown 8,500 miles from their regular quarters in Fort Bragg, N.C., to a training area 40 miles south of Seoul, South Korea. Immediately upon arrival in the test area, the paratroopers joined South Korean



troops in simulated counterguerrilla maneuvers. (The whole trip was to have taken thirty-one hours, but a snow storm caused a twenty-five-hour delay in Okinawa.) According to Pentagon press statements, the exercise was designed "to test the rapid reaction capability of the United States-based strike command forces to deploy in the Pacific command ready for tactical employment." From what has been published concerning the event, the Defense Department was satisfied with the outcome of the exercise.

When the first squadrons of C-5As are stationed at bases in the United States, Robert McNamara's fire brigade concept—best described as garrisons *in absentia*—will have finally come of age.

At this point, my review of U.S. military strategy in the Pacific-Indian Ocean area would be substantially complete if it were not for the fact that southern Asia harbors some of the most rugged terrain to be found on the face of the earth. Men and equipment that can be counted on to perform respectably in temperate regions—and even elite units like the 82nd Airborne—can be defeated by harsh and unfamiliar environments. While many extreme terrain conditions can be found in South Asia, two are of particular concern to the military: the tropical rain forest and high-mountain environments. The geological, biological and climatic conditions which characterize these regions have become the subject of what the Pentagon calls research on "environmental extremes." A number of little known Army agencies participate in these studies, among them the U.S. Army Institute of Environmental Medicine, and the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratories. Much of this research appears to be relatively innocuous; the function of the former, for instance, is to conduct "basic and applied research to determine how heat, cold, high terrestrial altitude, and work affect the soldier's life processes, his performance, and his health. The goal is to understand . . . the techniques, equipment, and procedures best calculated to make the soldier operationally effective to the optimal degree." Nevertheless, an awareness of this research enables one to anticipate some of the Pentagon's incursions into new areas. Thus if in 1962 we had known what kinds of studies were being undertaken at the Army Tropic Test Center in the Panama Canal Zone and at the Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center in Bangkok (e.g., engineering studies of vehicle movement in the "swamp forest environment"), the subsequent build-up of U.S. troops in Vietnam would have been somewhat less surprising. With this experience as background, a final word must be said about the Army's program of research on "high terrestrial altitude."

Between July 29 and August 26, 1966, some 200 soldiers of the 3rd Special Forces Group participated in an unprecedented troop exercise in the vicinity of

Mt. Evans, Colo. According to Army spokesmen, these Green Berets staged "the first field maneuver conducted by the U.S. Army above the critical 10,000-foot terrestrial elevation level." Mt. Evans was chosen for the exercise because it "provided the desired terrain at 11,500 to 13,500 feet, the minimal elevation considered essential to evaluate effects of 'thin atmosphere' on performance and health." These maneuvers, identified as a part of the "High Terrestrial Altitude Research Program," were sponsored by the U.S. Army Institute of Environmental Medicine and the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency. The program was designed, according to Army statements, "to insure a functional U.S. soldier properly adjusted, trained, equipped and supported to engage in combat at high elevations." A year later, the Army established "the world's highest research station" at the 17,600-foot level of Mt. Logan in the Yukon Territory of Canada. The Mt. Logan project was sponsored by the Cold Regions Laboratories and other Army agencies, and conducted by the Arctic Institute of North America. Like the Mt. Evans exercise, this project was designed to increase "U.S. Army knowledge of physiological factors associated with operations in a high-mountain environment."

Why is the Army so concerned with "physiological factors" occurring above the "critical 10,000-foot-level"? The answer can be found in a close reading of Army research reports. In a paper on "The Military Significance of Mountain Environment Studies," appearing in the May 1967 issue of *Army Research and Development*, a Pentagon scientist explains that mountainous terrain "occupies the whole southern frontier of Communist power from Central Europe to Vietnam." Since "mountains in many strategic areas will be barred to us for study purposes . . . it will often be necessary to find an accessible mountain range in which the environment seems quite similar, and study the nature of such [physiological] stresses there." With this advice in mind, one notes that the Mt. Logan project was intended to investigate "factors generally associated with activities in similar high altitudes in other parts of the world, such as the Himalayan Mountains in India." [Emphasis added.] The Himalayan Mountains constitute the western flank of the Asian defense perimeter, now being vacated by Great Britain.

The army says of the Mt. Evans maneuvers that "in view of the likelihood that the enemy may be fully acclimatized" to high elevations, the United States must be able to overcome the environmental effects of such regions on troop performance. Since the only "enemy" likely to be acclimatized to 10,000-foot-plus elevations are the inhabitants of the Himalayan region, it is becoming ominously clear that the U.S. counterinsurgency intervention in South Asia may some day stretch from the beaches of Danang to the furthest reaches of Nepal and Tibet. □



# THE SUN NEVER SETS ON AMERICA'S EMPIRE

## U.S. Bases In Asia

MICHAEL T. KLARE

*(Editors' note: The following article was written before President Nixon ordered U.S. troops into Cambodia.)*

When the United States Senate adopted an amendment to the military appropriation bill prohibiting the use of military aid funds for participation of U.S. combat troops in Laos, the Administration announced that it was in full accord with the Senate's action. Two months later, U.S. helicopters, transport planes and B-52 bombers were committed to the defense of the Plaine des Jarres.

Vietnamization? The Nixon Doctrine? Actions, not rhetoric, reveal the genuine meaning of a political policy. This is the standard we apply to other nations. When we apply it at home, the evidence indicates an expansion—rather than contraction—of U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia.

In its fiscal budget message to the Congress for 1970, the Pentagon argued that "there are no insuperable obstacles to the development of good local land forces capable of offering a credible deterrent to a Communist aggression" in Asia. However, the message continued, "it is less likely . . . that our Asian allies, except for Japan, will have the economic strength in the foreseeable future to become self-sufficient in air and naval forces or in logistical support." The United States, therefore, "should remain prepared to provide such support where needed"—and for this reason, it will be necessary for us to "continue some form of military presence in the region for some time, and this must include appropriate basing arrangements." (Emphasis added.)

What exactly is meant by "appropriate basing arrangements?" In the 19th century, overseas bases were considered primary instruments of colonial expansion, and the great imperial powers of Europe vied with one another for possession of naval bases commanding principal trade routes and for garrisons which controlled access to inland territories. In the 20th century, airplanes became a major instrument of warfare, and air bases assumed many

of the strategic characteristics that had once been the exclusive prerogative of naval stations. During the Second World War, island bases played a key role in the safeguarding of Atlantic convoys, while the war in the Pacific can be summarized as a struggle for control of strategic island-based landing fields.

In a discussion of the strategic function of overseas bases, T. B. Millar of the Institute for Strategic Studies in London explains that, "In naval or air terms, a base is normally considered to have substantial capacity to house, repair and supply ships or aircraft, and to defend itself or be defended against hostile attack." Since World War II, "The European ex-imperial powers have disposed of most of their external bases because they have disposed of the empires which they were designed to protect." The United States, which has established its hegemony in many ex-colonial areas abandoned by the European powers, has found it expedient to retain many of its overseas bases and even to acquire new "basing arrangements" in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas. As of Sept. 7, 1969, the U.S. maintained 1,188,894 servicemen at 429 major bases abroad, of which 55 are in Korea, 3 in Taiwan, 7 in Thailand, 6 in the Philippines, 25 on other Pacific islands, at least 59 in South Vietnam, and an unspecified number in Laos. Turning Millar's observations around, we find that the United States needs its Asian bases in order to protect the empire we have acquired.

Military bases come in different varieties: logistical bases, to supply troops at the front; communications bases, to maintain contact with roving air and naval patrols; headquarters bases, to exercise "command-and-control" functions over units in the field; rear-area bases, to house supply depots, reserve troops, and repair facilities. In the past two decades, the United States has acquired hundreds of new bases in Asia, has expanded existing facilities, and is now acquiring sites for future bases. Many of these bases, of course, will be dismantled when the Vietnam conflict is terminated—but many others are permanent installations designed for service in future Asian wars.



Major logistical bases, capable of handling the largest supply ships in existence, have been established on the mainland of Asia at Cam Ranh Bay in South Vietnam and at Sattahip in Thailand. While these bases are currently being used to funnel war matériel to the battlefields in Vietnam and Laos, they will retain a major strategic function—as forward staging points for large-scale military operations—long after the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam. The very *existence* of Cam Ranh Bay throws into question the basic assumptions of U.S. policy in Vietnam: if our presence there is to be a temporary affair, designed only to bolster the native military, why spend hundreds of millions of dollars on permanent facilities for a base on Vietnamese soil? Knowledgeable American journalists, including James Reston of the *New York Times*, have long been skeptical that the Pentagon has any intention of abandoning Cam Ranh Bay. As early as August, 1965, Reston wrote that

U.S. bases and supply areas are being constructed on a scale far larger than is necessary to care for the present level of American forces . . . in fact, the U.S. base at Cam Ranh . . . is being developed into another Okinawa, not merely for the purposes of this war, but as a major power complex from which American officials hope a wider alliance of Asian nations, with the help of the U.S., will eventually be able to contain the expansion of China.

While the “expansion of China” has never been an issue in the Vietnam conflict (or, for that matter, in Laos or Thailand), U.S. unwillingness to vacate this fortified beachhead in Southeast Asia has become a major point of contention at the Paris peace talks. On December 10, 1969, Reston reported in the *Times* that it has been a “fundamental question throughout the Paris negotiations” whether the U.S. is willing to abandon Cam Ranh and “many other modern military bases” operating in South Vietnam.

The naval facilities at Cam Ranh and Sattahip are complemented by U.S. air bases at Tan Son Nhut (Saigon) in South Vietnam and U-Taphao and Khorat in Thailand. These airfields are actually giant military complexes, with adjacent supply depots, communications facilities, living quarters, etc.. Like the naval bases, these installations will continue to function as staging points for U.S. military operations after the Vietnam conflict is settled. Large quantities of war supplies will be stored here to be used by troops flown in on the C-5A jet transport in the event of a future crisis. Of the Khorat airfield, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported in July, 1969, that while nominally under Thai command, it was in fact a “huge American military dump,” and that “equipment and vehicles and supplies for a large number of American troops have long been maintained here. The idea is that if ever needed in an emergency, American troops can be airlifted in and pick up their heavy equipment ahead of them at Khorat.”

U.S. communications, command-and-control and intelligence bases have been established throughout Southeast Asia. The most important of these is MACV headquarters (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) at Tan Son Nhut airport outside Saigon. From this complex of airstrips, warehouses and air-conditioned office buildings, General Creighton W. Abrams directs all U.S. military operations in South Vietnam. Tan Son Nhut is also the headquarters of the 7th U.S. Air Force and the site of the Combined Intelligence Center where, according to the *New York Times*, “day and night in its antiseptic interior a family of blinking, whirring computers devours, digests and spews out a Gargantuan diet of information about the enemy.”

Other bases, not as well known as Tan Son Nhut, oversee U.S. military and paramilitary activities in North Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The headquarters of the Fifth Special Forces Group located in the former resort city of Nhatrang, houses the B-57 detachment of the Special Operations Group, a CIA-controlled unit that operates networks of native intelligence agents throughout Southeast Asia. The Special Forces base at Kanchanaburi in Thailand (the setting for the novel, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*), performs similar intelligence function in that country. The U.S. air base at Udorn, also in Thailand, houses the CIA station responsible for coordination of intelligence-gathering missions along the system of roads and footpaths known to Westerners as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail.” U.S. military operations in Laos are directed from a Combined Operations Center in Vientiane, and, of course, from the U.S. Embassy in that city. Closer to the fighting, a secret communications and supply base at Long Cheng, at the southern edge of the Plaine des Jarres, serves as the headquarters of the Armée Clandestine (a force of 15,000 Meo mercenaries under CIA command). While none of these makeshift bases can boast the elaborate facilities of Tan Son Nhut, they will continue to play an important role in any future conflict in which American officers command large numbers of native troops.

Hundreds, even thousands of miles from the Vietnam battlefields lie the rear-area logistical bases whose activities are essential to the prosecution of the war. These bases include the huge supply and ammunition depots in Okinawa, Japan and the Philippines; the Strategic Air Command airfields on Okinawa and Guam (which house the giant B-52 bombers used in Vietnam and Laos); and the Navy’s repair and servicing facilities at Subic Bay in the Philippines. Without these strategically-located Pacific bases, the United States would be unable to mount large-scale military operations on the mainland of Asia. Our continued occupation of these bases, moreover, is considered a deterrent to any military adventures on the part of China and North Korea. It is understandable, therefore, that the Pentagon has become extremely worried about recent political developments in Japan, Okinawa and the



Philippines which jeopardize our rights to maintain bases there.

In June, 1968, a U.S. RF-101 jet from Itazuke Air Base in southern Japan crashed into a nearby university building, injuring students and setting off violent protests against U.S. occupation of the base. The Itazuke incident, coupled with a growing sense of national pride, has prompted many influential Japanese politicians to call for a reduction in the number of U.S. bases in Japan. As a result of this pressure, the Pentagon recently agreed to transfer control of 50 bases to Japan, leaving some 125 installations in American hands. (According to one Defense official, quoted by the *New York Times*, "What we are willing to give up is only of marginal value to our military capability.") Under the terms of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (signed in 1960), the United States is empowered to utilize its Japanese bases for military activities elsewhere in Asia; since these bases would be vitally important during any future conflict in Korea, the Pentagon is loathe to abandon its remaining bases in Japan. As Japanese nationalism grows, however, the U.S. will be under increasing pressure to scale down its military establishment in that country; the impending expiration of the Security Treaty, moreover, could set off violent mass protests at U.S. bases.

Increased nationalism and anti-Americanism are also a growing phenomenon in the Philippines, where the U.S. maintains three large bases—Subic Bay, Clark Field Air Base, and Sangley Point Naval Station—and several minor ones. Sangley Point, which is clearly visible from the Manila waterfront, is a continuous reminder of the U.S. presence in the Philippines and thus has become the focal point of public resentment. Philippine nationalists have demanded that Sangley Point be converted to a civilian airport and that restrictions be placed on the use of other American bases. Upon assuming office in January, 1969, Foreign Secretary Carlos P. Romulo told reporters that his government would seek to reduce the present 25-year tenure of U.S. bases in the Philippines. While the present Administration in Manila remains friendly to the United States, growing public opposition (dramatically expressed in the recent sacking of the U.S. Embassy) could ultimately compel the U.S. to abandon its Philippine bases.

Of all U.S. Pacific bases, none is more valuable, or important strategically, than Okinawa. Whatever happens to U.S. bases in Japan and the Philippines, *U.S. News and World Report* concluded, "it will be the loss of Okinawa . . . that will be most damaging." Here are the reasons they gave:

The U.S. has invested more than \$1 billion in the postwar years on what is probably the most elaborate multi-service military installation anywhere in the world.

Since the start of the Vietnam war, activity has increased tenfold. Okinawa, long the mainstay of U.S. defenses in the Western Pacific, has now become also a giant funnel through which much of the paraphernalia

of war pours into South Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

U.S. money and imagination have turned the island—67 miles long and from 2½ to 19 miles wide—into one vast patchwork of military posts, airfields, an Army port, training camps and housing complexes. In all, there are 117 separate military installations on the one island.

U.S. troops stationed on the island include the 3rd Marine Division (the first large American combat units to be deployed in Vietnam), the 1st Special Forces Group, and assorted logistical, communications and supply personnel. Also housed here are three bomber squadrons, whose B-52 bombers fly daily bombing missions against targets in South Vietnam.

In addition to serving as a logistics center for conventional warfare on the mainland of Asia, Okinawa constitutes the major U.S. nuclear war facility in the Far East. The 489th Tactical Missile Group in Okinawa is equipped with MACE-B nuclear missiles, and the F-105 Thunderchiefs of the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing can be armed with nuclear bombs stored on the island. Vast underground arsenals, called "igloos," are stocked with tactical nuclear warheads for emergency use in Korea and China. In addition, the Okinawan port of Naha is equipped to service the dozen nuclear-armed Polaris submarines that are believed to cruise the Pacific. The nuclear build-up on Okinawa is cited by *Le Monde* as evidence that "American strategy in Asia, with its implied pressure on Vietnam and Korea and its policy of 'containing' China, hinges on Okinawa."

Opposition to U.S. occupation of Okinawa surfaced last year as a major foreign policy dispute between Japan and the United States. Under the terms of the 1952 peace treaty with Japan, to which the island had belonged, no time limit was set on U.S. occupation of Okinawa. The resurgence of nationalism in Japan, however, has led to the demand (also voiced by the Okinawans themselves) that the U.S. recognize Japanese sovereignty over the island. The question of reversion to Japanese control had already become a major issue by last July, when the accidental leakage of lethal nerve gas on the island threatened to provoke a serious rupture in U.S.-Japanese relations. As a result of the gas incident, Premier Eisaku Sato pledged to make reversion the primary foreign policy objective of his administration. In November, after three days of talks with President Nixon in Washington, Sato secured a pledge that Okinawa would be restored to Japanese rule by 1972.

The final Nixon-Sato communiqué refers cautiously to the sensitive issue of nuclear installations. The official text notes that Sato "described in detail the particular sentiment of the Japanese people against nuclear weapons and the policy of the Japanese Government reflecting such sentiment [i.e., prohibition of nuclear weapons on Japanese territory]." In reply, "the President expressed his deep understanding and assured the Prime Minister that . . . the reversion of Okinawa would be carried out in a



manner consistent with the policy of the Japanese Government as described by the Prime Minister." While no other details were revealed on the nuclear issue, it was agreed that reversion of the island would not jeopardize supply operations for the Vietnam war. Thus while Okinawa will continue to serve as a major logistics base for U.S. forces, it will probably lose its strategic function as a nuclear arsenal.

As soon as it became apparent to U.S. military planners that the status of our bases on Okinawa might be altered, the Pentagon ordered studies of potential fallback positions. From available information, it appears that the location presently favored by the Pentagon for such purposes is the Mariana islands in the South Pacific. The Marianas—Guam, Saipan, Tinian and Rota—are part of the 2,000 islands of Micronesia held by the U.S. under a United Nations trusteeship. Unlike all other U.N. trusteeships, the Micronesia agreement permits the U.S. to construct military bases there at its own discretion. In the past three years, several high Pentagon officials have made secret trips to the Marianas to determine their suitability for new strategic bases. Recent visitors to the island, including Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, former Pacific commander, and Lt. Gen. Lewis W. Walt, assistant Marine Commandant, reportedly examined "an extensive collection of maps showing the prime locations for airfields, naval bases and missile sites." Apparently these visitors liked what they found, for *U.S. News and World Report* indicated in 1967 that if the U.S. were forced to find a new location for its Okinawa facilities, "The preference of top military planners is already known. There will be a withdrawal to the Mariana Islands, if present planning is approved." In addition to a "complex of troop-staging and logistics bases for conventional wars in Asia," the islands would be used for missile sites and submarine berths.

The selection of Micronesia as a fallback position for relocated bases would of course be consistent with the southward thrust of U.S. expansion in the Pacific, and would satisfy the Pentagon's logistical requirements for future military operations in East Asia. America's expanding interests in the Indian Ocean area, however, are not presently protected by any installations comparable to U.S. Pacific bases. The Defense Department has therefore undertaken a quiet search for new bases that could ultimately be used to sustain large-scale military operations in this area.

The first requirement for expanded military activity in the Indian Ocean was a communications facility to serve U.S. naval vessels. In order to satisfy this need, the U.S. was able to exploit the extremely close relations it enjoys with Australia. The present government in Canberra, which has linked the security of Australia to a continued U.S. military presence in Asia, has given the United States *carte blanche* to establish bases on Australian territory. One of the products of this unusual offer is the U.S. Naval

Communications Station Harold E. Holt, named for the late Prime Minister, now nearing completion at North West Cape, Australia. The new base will house very-low-frequency transmitters (for communicating with submerged Polaris submarines) as well as standard radios. A second communications facility has been established on the other side of the Indian Ocean at Asmara, Ethiopia.

The most pressing need at the present time, in the view of Defense planners, is a repair and supply base in or near the Indian Ocean like those in the Philippines, Japan and Okinawa. The Navy would like to gain access to the Union of South Africa's Simonstown naval base for this purpose, but present diplomatic sanctions preclude this solution. Another possible site for such facilities is the Chagos Archipelago, a group of small islands incorporated into the British Indian Ocean Territory. In a little-known agreement, signed April 1, 1967, the United States obtained the right to construct military installations on these islands. No overt move has been made as yet to fortify these islands, however, since the Pentagon apparently hopes to acquire a base with ready-made facilities. The most likely choice for such a move is Singapore, where the elaborate British air and naval bases will soon go up for sale.

Soon after Britain announced that it would withdraw all its forces east of the Mediterranean by 1971, the United States expressed an interest in acquiring the Singapore bases. A 1969 *New York Times* dispatch from Singapore indicated that "The United States Navy is quietly seeking a formula for the use of the well-equipped British naval base here for repairs and maintenance." The *Times* also reported that "United States warships call regularly at Singapore and admirals frequently tour the British installations." Among the visitors was Adm. John S. McCain, Jr., commander of American forces in the Pacific. The admirals must have been satisfied with what they saw, for on January 9 Vice President Agnew, then on a tour of our Asian allies, told reporters in Singapore that the U.S. would enter into a "definite relationship" with the island-state for use of the bases. Such an arrangement, according to the Vice President's aides, would consist of contracts for repairs on U.S. ships and planes at the bases Britain will vacate.

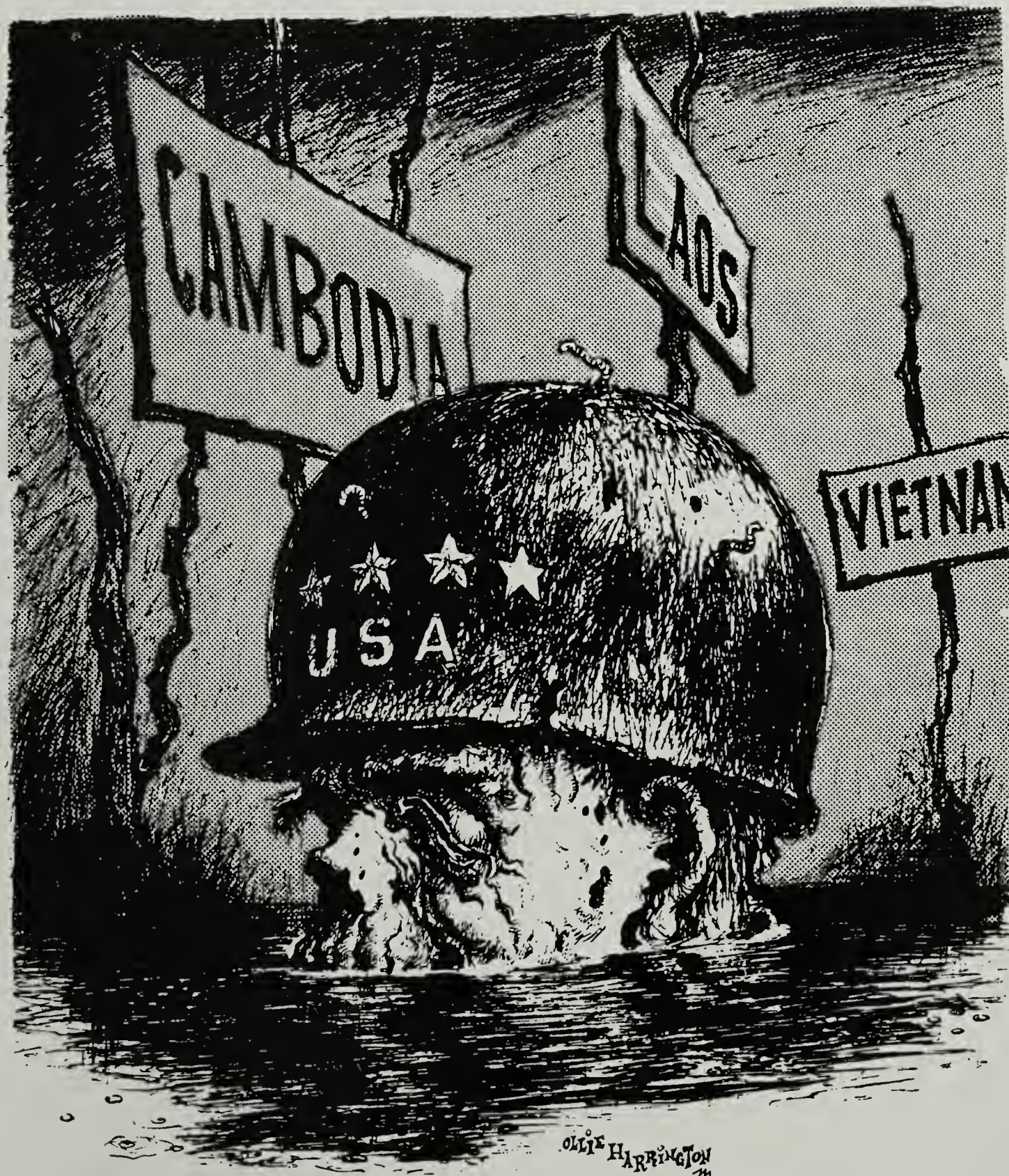
The Pentagon is apparently very apprehensive that premature publicity of the impending agreement with Singapore would cause an adverse reaction at home. One reporter who accompanied the Vice President on his Asian tour observed that "Congressional and public disaffection with United States military involvements overseas has reportedly forced the United States Department of Defense to move quietly in any negotiations with Singapore." In order to preclude domestic opposition, the Pentagon has encouraged the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation to bargain on its behalf. Lockheed—for all practical purposes a bankrupt organization—announced December 1, 1969 that it had reached an agreement with the Singa-



pore Government to establish a major aircraft repair and maintenance facility on the island. The California-based firm will eventually take over the magnificently-equipped Royal British Air Force base at Changi, on the eastern end of the island, with the expectation of getting substantial Pentagon contracts for servicing of U.S. aircraft stationed in Asia. Since Lockheed recently petitioned the Defense Department for an immediate \$655 million subsidy to avert collapse, Pentagon journalists are quite reasonably skeptical that the company could guarantee the \$4 million down payment on the Singapore base from its own cash resources. Indeed, *Armed Forces Journal* reported from Washington that "one speculation advanced here is that, conceivably, Lockheed may be acting as a conduit to set up a nominally private U.S. military aircraft overhaul facility in neutral Singapore. . . . Under

this theory, U.S. Government funds might, in some book-keeping ledgerdom, be channeled via Lockheed as a cover activity." If Lockheed's plans are carried out, it will represent a unique instance of a private company's negotiating the sovereign interests of the U.S. Government.

United States policy in Asia—so the Administration has informed us—calls for the gradual reduction of U.S. military strength in the area. Since its announcement last summer, however, many journalists and Senators have questioned whether this policy, the so-called "Nixon Doctrine," has any substance to it at all. The growing U.S. involvement in Indochina indicates that no change in U.S. policy has occurred in the short run, while the information presented here on the expansion of U.S. "basing arrangements" in Asia demonstrates that no changes are likely in the long-run, either.



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